

Behind Digital Da'wah for Children: Psychological Influence, Symbolic Power, and Pious Capitalism in Indonesian Islamic Animation

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Abstract

The animated series *Nussa and Rarra* is often praised in affirmative literature as an effective medium for *da'wah* and character education for children. However, this study presents a counter-narrative by examining how the series undermines children's psychological development. Employing a qualitative case-study approach and multimodal discourse analysis of seven selected episodes, the study identifies three interrelated discursive mechanisms. First, media logic and religious framing reduce children's natural behaviors to moral-religious crises that are immediately resolved and normalized as standard. Second, parental authority is legitimized through a monopoly on religious claims, masking disguises domestic obedience as spiritual submission. Third, piety is commodified through a transactional logic described as "pious capitalism." This progression results in the formation of a religious subjectivity that encourages external compliance and transactional reasoning rather than genuine, reasoned faith. The study highlights that the primary concern is not the presence of religion itself, but in the manner in which it is conveyed—bypassing children's capacity for critical reasoning.

Keywords: *Mediatization of Religion, Nussa and Rarra, Symbolic Power, Pious Capitalism, Multimodal Discourse Analysis.*

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Introduction

Research in developmental psychology shows that, beginning at age five, children naturally regard curiosity as a moral virtue and behave more prosocially toward curious



individuals than toward indifferent ones.¹ However, a conceptual tension arises when media designed to educate children treat that curiosity as a crisis that must be immediately suppressed. This phenomenon lies at the intersection of three conflicting fields of study: developmental psychology,² which emphasizes active exploration and gradual reasoning; the theory of religious mediatization,³ which warns against the oversimplification of religious complexity resulting from submission to media logic; and children's media studies,⁴ which tend to affirmatively celebrate popular religious outreach. Within this blind spot, an urgent academic question emerges: what if media that claim to foster children's religious development are, in fact, closing off the space necessary for the development of reasoning itself?

The animated series *Nussa and Rarra*—one of the most popular Islamic children's shows in Indonesia, reaching tens of millions of viewers—serves as an ideal case study to examine this tension. Marketed as a child-friendly medium for teaching values, an initial analysis of the series reveals a consistent pattern of restricting exploration. Children's existential questions about death are not explored cognitively but are immediately dismissed through a theology of protection;⁵ expressions of identity through face paint are curtailed by the doctrine of *tabarruj* (the display of one's beauty and adornment);⁶ and

¹ Ariel J Mosley, Cindel J M White, and Larisa Heiphetz Solomon, "Children's Moral Evaluations of and Behaviors toward People Who Are Curious about Religion and Science," *Child Development* 95, no. 4 (July 1, 2024): e224–35, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.14088>.

² Melanie Killen and Audun Dahl, "Moral Reasoning Enables Developmental and Societal Change," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 16, no. 6 (November 23, 2021): 1209–25, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620964076>.

³ Stig Hjarvard, "The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change," *Northern Lights: Film and Media Studies Yearbook* 6, no. 1 (June 2008): 9–26, https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.6.1.9_1; Stig Hjarvard, "Mediatization and the Changing Authority of Religion," *Media, Culture & Society* 38, no. 1 (January 20, 2016): 8–17, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443715615412>; Ahmad Amanullah, "The Cyber Quran as a Semiotic Shield: Mediatization of Obedience and Crisis Communication in Iran's State Discourse on X," *Journal of Quranic Media Studies* 1, no. 1 (June 19, 2026): 75–94, <https://doi.org/10.66277/JQMS.1.1.236>.

⁴ Muhammad Munif et al., "A Thematic and Bibliometric Analysis of Trends and Future Directions in Da'wah Research," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 13, no. 1 (December 31, 2026), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2026.2620838>.

⁵ NussaOfficial, "Nussa: Hiiii Serem!!!," YouTube Video, October 25, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q47uqC9rUnM&t=124s>.

⁶ NussaOfficial, "Nussa: Girls Talk," YouTube Video, September 27, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzeraTjShcw&t=21s>.

religious practices are reduced to a calculation of “reward savings.”⁷ These three examples confirm that the theoretical issue manifests concretely in popular children’s discourse. Based on these observations, this study aims to systematically analyze how the *Nussa and Rarra* series diminishes children’s psychological and developmental dynamics, legitimizes parental authority, and commodifies piety—as well as the implications of these processes for the study of the mediatization of children’s religion.

Previous studies of the *Nussa and Rarra* series generally operate within an affirmative paradigm, positioning the series as an effective medium for Islamic education and da’wah for children. Most research focuses on mapping normative content—ranging from Islamic educational values⁸ and moral character⁹ to religious moderation¹⁰—as well as its use as a tool for digital learning and da’wah on YouTube.¹¹ Although varied in focus, this literature converges on a common consensus: celebrating the series’ success in instilling Islamic values through popular narratives. What has been overlooked in this mainstream research is a critical examination of what is actually sidelined when children’s psychological and developmental dynamics are reframed as moral and religious imperatives. This academic gap serves as the starting point for the present study.

To address this gap, this study critically analyzes how the *Nussa and Rarra* series reframe children’s psychological and developmental dynamics through three interrelated

⁷ NussaOfficial, “Cerita Nussa & Rarra: 1 Huruf 10 Keabakan,” YouTube Video, March 20, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLWQK0VFZR8&t=49s>.

⁸ Santibi Saputri, “Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Islam Dalam Film Kartun Animasi ‘Nussa Dan Rara’” (UIN Raden Intan Lampung, 2025); Rizal Dj. Kasim, Zainuddin Soga, and Alivia Heratika Mamonto, “Analisis Semiotik Ferdinand de Saussure Terhadap Nilai-Nilai Da’wah Pada Film Nussa Dan Rara,” *KOMUNIDA: Media Komunikasi Dan Dakwah* 12, no. 2 (December 15, 2022): 196–221, <https://doi.org/10.35905/komunida.v12i2.3370>; Nur Aini, “Pesan Dakwah Dalam Film Animasi Nussa Dan Rara Episode 1-5 (Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes),” *MUKASI: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 2, no. 1 (February 28, 2023): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.54259/mukasi.v2i1.1314>.

⁹ Medina Nur Asyifah Purnama, “Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Moral (Santun Dan Hormat Pada Orang Lain) Dalam Film Animasi Nussa Dan Rara (Dalam Episode Kak Nussa),” *Scaffolding: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Dan Multikulturalisme* 2, no. 1 (March 26, 2020): 38–48, <https://doi.org/10.37680/scaffolding.v2i1.279>.

¹⁰ Alifa Nur Fitri, “Moderasi Beragama Dalam Tayangan Anak-Anak; Analisis Isi Tayangan Nussa Dan Rara Episode Toleransi,” *Jurnal SMART (Studi Masyarakat, Religi, Dan Tradisi)* 8, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 129–46, <https://doi.org/10.18784/smart.v8i1.1523>.

¹¹ Salsabila Januar Putri and Ainun Nadlif, “Penerapan Film Animasi Nussa Dan Rara Sebagai Media Pembelajaran Akidah Akhlak,” *Research and Development Journal of Education* 9, no. 2 (October 11, 2023): 1140, <https://doi.org/10.30998/rdje.v9i2.19240>; Ridha Hayati, “Transmisi Dan Transformasi Dakwah (Sebuah Kajian Living Hadis Dalam Channel Youtube Nussa Official),” *Jurnal Bimas Islam* 13, no. 1 (July 21, 2020): 161–82, <https://doi.org/10.37302/jbi.v13i1.185>.

analytical objectives. First, it examines how media logic and religious framing reduce children's natural dynamics to moral-spiritual crises, normalizing this distortion as the standard. Second, it analyzes the legitimization of parental authority through a monopoly on religious claims that encode domestic obedience as unquestionable spiritual compliance. Third, it uncovers the commodification of piety within a transactional framework that transforms religious obedience into a calculated of value exchange. Through this investigation, the study reveals that behind its image as child-friendly educational media, the *Nussa and Rarra* series operate through reduction, legitimization, and commodification that systematically restrict children's psychological freedom.

This study argues that, behind its educational facade, the *Nussa and Rarra* series functions as an instrument that subjugates children's psychological development to a predetermined religious framework. This argument is based on the thesis that psychological reduction, the legitimization of authority, and the commodification of piety form a discursive sequence that mutually reinforces itself hierarchically: reduction at the level of discourse paves the way for the legitimization of authority at the level of relationships, which in turn underpins commodification at the economic-cultural level. The effectiveness of this process stems precisely from its concealment behind narrative and visual aesthetics that appear natural, so that the restriction of children's freedom is never recognized as a form of subjugation. The urgency of this argument lies in the cognitive capacity of its audience: children under the age of eight are not yet able to recognize the persuasive intent of media,¹² so ideological messages wrapped in entertainment are accepted without critical filtering. By integrating media studies, religious studies, and developmental psychology, this research asserts that the core issue lies in the bypassing of children's reasoning capacity. This study makes a critical contribution by filling a gap in the existing literature, highlighting children as vulnerable subjects who lack the ability to negotiate the discourses that shape them.

Method

This study analyzes the animated series *Nussa and Rarra*, focusing on narrative discourse, visual composition, and epilogue structure in selected episodes. The series was chosen due to its significance as one of the most popular Islamic children's programs in Indonesia, marketed as a medium for teaching child-friendly values—making it an ideal subject for examining the tension between pedagogical claims and the underlying

¹² Jenny Radesky et al., "Digital Advertising to Children," *Pediatrics* 146, no. 1 (July 1, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-1681>.

discursive mechanisms. The study employs a qualitative approach with a case-study design, which is methodologically appropriate for the in-depth examination of complex, context-bound phenomena.¹³ The corpus was selected through purposive sampling based on the criterion of thematic representativeness—specifically, episodes that explicitly reframe children’s psychological and developmental dynamics as moral and religious issues.¹⁴ Based on these criteria, seven episodes were selected: “Hiii Serem!!!,” “1 Huruf 10 Kebajikan,” “Jadi Suka Sayur,” “Jangan Sombong!,” “Girlstalk,” “#BaikItuMudah,” and “Teman Spesial Rarra.” The last episode was intentionally included as a deviant case to test the extent to which the consistency of the findings when confronted with an exception.¹⁵

The data sources consist of audiovisual materials in the form of recorded episodes from the NussaOfficial YouTube channel, supplemented by secondary data including relevant academic literature and theoretical frameworks. Data collection involved non-participant observation, accompanied by transcriptions of the characters’ speech, screen captures of key scenes, and systematic documentation of visual elements. The data were analyzed using Multimodal Discourse Analysis in three sequential stages. First, a textual analysis of the characters’ speech was conducted to identify patterns of verbal framing. Second, a visual analysis of the composition of gestures, gaze direction, spatial distance, and camera angles was performed, grounded in the Grammar of Visual Design to encode power relations among actors.¹⁶ Third, cross-episode thematic mapping was carried out to uncover structural regularities that might be overlooked in the analysis of individual episodes. These three levels of analysis are interpreted integrally through the theoretical lenses of the mediatization of religion, cultural reproduction and symbolic power, and spiritual economies. The consistency of the findings was ensured through triangulation across the levels of analysis, leading to analytical-theoretical generalizations.

The Mediatization of Children’s Issues in the *Nussa and Rarra* Series: Media Logic, Religious Framing, and Psychological-Developmental Reduction

¹³ Bent Flyvbjerg, “Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 2 (April 1, 2006): 219–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363>.

¹⁴ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles: Sage Publication Inc., 2015).

¹⁵ Jason Seawright and John Gerring, “Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research,” *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (June 9, 2008): 294–308, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907313077>.

¹⁶ Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (London: Routledge, 1996).

The mediatization of religion represents a fundamental shift in which religious expression becomes systematically governed by rules of media logic—such as production conventions, visual dramaturgy, narrative time constraints, and accelerated resolutions that prioritize efficiency in message delivery. Within the realm of children's popular media, this media logic manifests through mechanisms of religious framing that reduce children's psychological dynamics and natural developmental stages to simplistic moral-spiritual crises.¹⁷ Everyday experiences, which are inherently grounded in cognitive development and socio-emotional exploration, are not interpreted through complex psychological causality. Instead, the pressures of commodification and the short-form narrative structures typical of popular media bypass this space for nuanced exploration, transforming it into a quick-fix therapeutic tool resolved dogmatically through the normative dichotomy of “allowed” versus “not allowed.”¹⁸ This discursive process, which prompts such psychological-developmental reduction, is demonstrated progressively through recurring themes across episodes in the *Nussa and Rarra* series.

This discourse on children's media discourse reveals how neutral psychological dynamics are often discursively truncated and redirected into moral-religious crises, bypassing the normal phases of developmental exploration. This pattern is consistently evident in three examples from Rarra's speech. First, the child's expressions of anxiety and cognitive curiosity about existential boundaries emerge through the question, “If someone has died, can they come back?” as well as a fantasy narrative: “...Rarra's friend said that wandering spirits can actually go for walks...”¹⁹ Second, the dynamics of picky eating and the child's characteristic avoidance strategies are demonstrated through a quiet bargaining statement: “Shh, Nussa... do you want to trade?”—offering to swap spinach for chicken.²⁰ Third, the exploration of identity and the articulation of children's body aesthetics appear through the explicit question, “Mom, is it really not okay to put on makeup?”²¹ These three textual examples confirm the presence of a discursive process that bypasses an understanding of psychological-developmental causality; the normative

¹⁷ Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (London: Routledge, 2006), 78; Kent Asp, “Mediatization: Rethinking the Question of Media Power,” in *Mediatization of Communication*, ed. Knut Lundby (Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2014), 349–74.

¹⁸ Lynn Schofield Clark, *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 243.

¹⁹ NussaOfficial, “Nussa: Hiiii Serem!!!”

²⁰ NussaOfficial, “Nussa: Jadi Suka Sayur,” YouTube Video, April 12, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_z_v7kntXS8&t=37s.

²¹ NussaOfficial, “Nussa: Girls Talk.”

responses presented do not first validate or explore the child's natural motives but instead immediately frame these everyday events within a normative-religious dichotomy of moral permissibility.

The reduction of the child's issue from the psychological-developmental realm to a moral crisis is also accomplished through visual discourse engineering, which primes the audience's emotions before the normative-religious explanation is introduced. This visual framing preemptively casts the child's natural expressions as forms of moral deviance (see Figure 1).



Source: NussaOfficial YouTube Channel

Figure 1. Expressions of a Child's Crisis through Visual Manipulation and Semiotic Signification

The three panels in Figure 1 illustrate how normal developmental dynamics in children—ranging from the process of social learning (left panel)²² and material desires (center panel)²³ to pride in personal achievements (right panel)²⁴—are visually depicted as forms of emotional crisis and moral failings. The imitation of religious worship is interpreted as a sign of inferiority through the direction of Nussa's gaze and her admiring gestures; the desire for a new bag is portrayed as selfish whining through Rarra's pouting expression as she clings to her old bag; while the expression of self-pride in acquiring a gadget is explicitly represented as a spiritual deviation through the addition of a symbolic attribute—a purple monster figure on Rarra's shoulder. This visual composition confirms that the children's neutral gestures and emotional expressions have been coded as deviations from the very beginning of the camera framing, thereby guiding the audience's

²² NussaOfficial, "Cerita Nussa & Rarra: 1 Huruf 10 Kebaikan."

²³ NussaOfficial, "Nussa: #BaikituMudah," YouTube Video, May 24, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sghAqhta08E>.

²⁴ NussaOfficial, "Nussa: Jangan Sombong," YouTube Video, October 11, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFdZ-kzyXCY&t=99s>.

interpretation of the children's actions into the realm of a religious crisis even before the corrective dialogue begins.

The visual and textual reduction of the child's dynamics is not merely a narrative coincidence but constitutes a consistent structural pattern in the *Nussa and Rarra* series. The imbalance between the predominantly explored religious realm and the systematically neglected non-religious realm is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Patterns of Problem Manifestation and Closure of Exploration Across Episodes

Episode	Problem Manifestation	Unexplored Non-Religious Realms
<i>Hii Serem!!!</i>	Fear of death & spirits	Children's cognitive development regarding the concept of death
<i>1 Huruf 10 Kebaikan</i>	Shyness/lack of diligence in reading the Qur'an	Accessibility of letters and children's play preferences
<i>Baik Itu Mudah</i>	Desire for a new bag	Children's social comparisons and material desires
<i>Jadi Suka Sayur</i>	Picky eating & manipulation (giving food to the cat)	Texture/taste factors and children's avoidance strategies
<i>Jangan Sombong</i>	Excessive pride in achievements	Children's need for reasonable self-validation
<i>Girlstalk</i>	Interest in makeup	Children's exploration of identity and self-expression

The data in Table 1 confirm that all manifestations of children's issues—ranging from existential fears²⁵ and reluctance to eat²⁶ to expressions of self-expression²⁷—are exclusively framed as moral-spiritual crises, without ever addressing their psychological or developmental dimensions. The absence of alternative explanations in the third column across the episodes reveals a standardized pattern of discourse production that systematically excludes non-religious interpretations: children's natural motivations are consistently overlooked to justify the immediate imposition of religious doctrine.

This is where the concept of “naturalness” serves as the primary ideological strategy in the *Nussa and Rarra* series. Children's growth and development are not allowed to unfold freely; instead, they are deliberately guided toward religious doctrines predetermined from the outset. The media effectively make this guidance appear entirely natural. Various natural behaviors of children—such as curiosity about death, picky eating,

²⁵ NussaOfficial, “Nussa: Hiiii Serem!!!”

²⁶ NussaOfficial, “Nussa: Jadi Suka Sayur.”

²⁷ NussaOfficial, “Cerita Nussa & Rarra: 1 Huruf 10 Kebaikan”; NussaOfficial, “Nussa: #BaikItuMudah.”

and the urge to express themselves—are transformed into moral crises. Visual techniques, ranging from facial expressions to the inclusion of monster figures, mask these ideological choices as an authentic portrayal of the world. The repetition of this pattern across episodes causes the narrative construction to gradually become accepted as “common sense.”²⁸ The main issue lies not in the religious teachings themselves but in the subtle and unconscious restriction of children’s psychological freedom. Thus, naturalization is not a side effect but the series’ *modus operandi*.

This implicit framework reveals that the *Nussa and Rarra* series do not merely convey a religious message but also enact a process of cultural reproduction—a project undertaken by the urban Muslim middle class to raise religious children through the medium of animation. Analytical focus must therefore shift from the medium itself to the social actors behind it: this social group employs animation to instill religious dispositions from an early age. Within Bourdieu’s framework, this process constitutes the formation of *habitus*—the internalization of a matrix of dispositions that becomes a taken-for-granted worldview before children have the opportunity to critically reflect on it.²⁹ Every neutral developmental impulse—curiosity about death, reluctance to eat, or self-expression—is immediately corrected to align with the dominant group’s values. This is where symbolic violence operates: the imposition of cultural values occurs so subtly that it is accepted as normal by the children who are its targets.³⁰ This process of reproduction is highly effective because it conceals the arbitrary nature of these values behind a veil of naturalness, making the child’s upbringing in a specific religious direction appear as the only inevitable path of development.

Criticism of this process of cultural reproduction becomes even more pronounced when contrasted with earlier literature. Most studies on *Nussa and Rarra* have been affirmative, celebrating the series as a vehicle for Islamic preaching and character education without questioning what is excluded from the scope of children’s psychological development.³¹ The findings of this study challenge that assessment: what is celebrated as

²⁸ Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London: Longman, 1989), 91–92.

²⁹ Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (London: SAGE Publications, 1990), 9.

³⁰ Bourdieu and Passeron, 8.

³¹ Stefani Stefani and Karim Karim, “Islamic Animated Media as an Educational Tool: An Analysis of Islamic Educational Values in Nussa and Rara and Their Impact on Elementary School Students’ Religious Competence,” *Attaqwa: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Islam* 22, no. 2 (April 20, 2026): 139–48, <https://doi.org/10.54069/attaqwa.v22i2.1104>; Syarli Wahyuni, Ahmad Jamin, and Daflizar Daflizar,

a pedagogical success actually functions as an unnoticed constraint on children's development. Furthermore, this study broadens the examination of the commodification of piety among Indonesia's urban Muslim middle class—which has predominantly focused on adult consumption—to include children as subjects through the medium of animation.³² Finally, in contrast to children's media research that emphasizes the importance of active mediation and emotional reasoning,³³ the *Nussa and Rarra* series bypasses these developmental processes through instant moral resolutions. This contrast highlights the novelty of these findings within the field of religious media studies.

The Legitimization of Parental Authority in the *Nussa and Rarra* Series: Symbolic Power, Domestic Discipline, and the Instrumentalization of Doctrine

The reconstruction of children's issues as a moral-religious crisis necessitates the emergence of a legitimate resolution, wherein animated media facilitates the transfer of parenting authority. When religion-based parenting discourse is adapted into an animated format, symbolic power is no longer anchored in real institutions but is embodied by narrative characters who are discursively positioned as legitimate agents.³⁴ Within the framework of mediatization, the logic of representation encodes the caregiver figure on screen as the sole authority responsible for interpreting doctrine, enforcing domestic discipline, and establishing moral boundaries for children.³⁵ This conceptualization elucidates how media texts reinforce parental authority by delegating theological roles,

"Character Education Values in the Animated Series Nussa: A Semiotic Approach," *Indonesian Journal of Counseling and Development* 6, no. 1 (July 30, 2024): 68–80, <https://doi.org/10.32939/IJCD.V6I1.6010>.

³² Ariel Heryanto, "Upgraded Piety and Pleasure: The New Middle Class and Islam in Indonesian Popular Culture," in *Islam and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia*, ed. Andrew N. Weintraub (London: Routledge, 2011); Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Making of Public Islam: Piety, Agency, and Commodification on the Landscape of the Indonesian Public Sphere," *Contemporary Islam* 3, no. 3 (October 24, 2009): 229–50, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-009-0096-9>; Puji Izzatulbuhtiah and Ola Fedda Mona Denona, "Cyber-Spirituality and Platform Logic: Intertextual Alignment of the Qur'an and the Affective Commodification of Indonesian Muslim Pop Music," *Journal of Islam, Media and Society* 1, no. 1 (June 18, 2026): 43–62, <https://doi.org/10.66277/JIMS.1.1.242>.

³³ Drew P. Cingel and Marina Krcmar, "Prosocial Television, Preschool Children's Moral Judgments, and Moral Reasoning: The Role of Social Moral Intuitions and Perspective-Taking," *Communication Research* 46, no. 3 (April 3, 2019): 355–74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650217733846>.

³⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 59.

³⁵ Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age*, 115.

such that a child's narrative obedience to the caregiver figure is automatically construed as spiritual obedience.

The legitimization of authority within the religious discourse of children's media establishes symbolic power through the citation of sacred texts and Sharia terminology, effectively shutting down children's attempts to negotiate or challenge arguments. This pattern is consistently expressed through the speech of authority figures. Umma suppresses Rarra's self-expression using *fiqh* (Islamic law) doctrine: "What is not permitted in adornment is *tabarruj* (the display of one's beauty and adornment)..."³⁶ Nussa undermines Rarra's pride in her achievements through dogmatic labeling: "If you're arrogant... you're a friend of the devil!"³⁷ Grandpa the Merchant legitimizes reciting the Qur'an by emphasizing the calculation of rewards: "...even a single letter is worth 10 good deeds..."³⁸ In contrast, in the episode "Rarra's Special Friend," Umma begins her authoritative explanation with a medical-psychological discourse: "...people with autism... have difficulty understanding what others are thinking..." before reframing it theologically as "the key to paradise."³⁹ This discourse data confirms that children's obedience is constructed through a monopoly on religious claims; when addressing non-doctrinal issues, authority figures borrow the language of pure science before interpreting it within a spiritual framework.

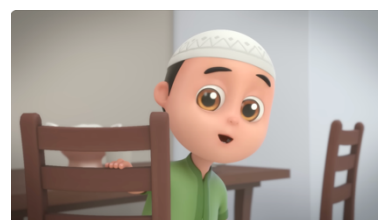
The authority figures' citation of sacred texts is visually represented through spatial and gestural compositions that emphasize the child's subordination to the doctrine's custodians. This semiotic strategy clearly illustrates the hierarchy of power and the child's obedience during the doctrinal explanation (see Figure 2).



Umma's Gesture



Passive Expression of the
Recipient



Nussa's Gesture

Source: NussaOfficial YouTube Channel

³⁶ NussaOfficial, "Nussa: Girls Talk."

³⁷ NussaOfficial, "Nussa: Jangan Sombong."

³⁸ NussaOfficial, "Cerita Nussa & Rarra: 1 Huruf 10 Kebajikan."

³⁹ NussaOfficial, "New Series 'Rarra': Teman Spesial Rarra," YouTube Video, June 17, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ol6RmcV2TSo&t=29s>.

Figure 2. Visualization of Authoritative Gestures in the *Nussa and Rarra* Series.

In the left panel of Figure 2, the disparity in body posture is illustrated by Umma's gesture as she stands upright with her index finger raised while quoting a verse from the Qur'an, asserting her communicative dominance over *Nussa and Rarra*, who are seated with their heads bowed.⁴⁰ In the center panel, the children's role as passive recipients of doctrine are emphasized by *Nussa and Rarra's* stunned expressions—their eyes wide open—as they listen to the explanation of the verse's meaning.⁴¹ Meanwhile, in the right panel, the intergenerational transmission of religious authority is evident when Nussa assumes this authoritative role through calm body language while explaining that prayers to Allah are surely answered.⁴² In contrast, in the episode "*Teman Spesial Rarra*," the power dynamic no longer flows vertically from top to bottom; instead, Rarra physically dominates Andre before ultimately being disarmed by a gesture of equality among the children. This visual composition confirms that the monopoly on sacred authority is consistently legitimized through the superiority of physical gestures and the subordination of the child's response.

The manifestation of this authority and visual hierarchy creates a framework of parenting legitimacy that systematically connects every parenting directive to religious values and doctrines throughout the episodes. The mapping of the parenting domain, along with the religious instruments used to reinforce parenting authority, is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Legitimization of Parenting Authority Based on Religious Values Across Episodes

Episode	Parenting Authority Figure	Parenting Domain	Legitimization / Religious Values Used
<i>Hiiii Serem!!!</i>	Umma	Managing fear & emotions	Q.S. Ali 'Imran: 185 (certainty of death) & Hadith on the three acts of ongoing charity
1 <i>Huruf Kebaikan</i>	Grandfather the Merchant and Nussa	Establishing habits of worship	Doctrine of calculating rewards for recitation & the concept of the virtue of steadfastness
<i>Jadi Suka Sayur</i>	Umma	Nutritional discipline & eating habits	Q.S. Al-An'am: 99 (halal/healthy food) & gratitude for blessings

⁴⁰ NussaOfficial, "Nussa: Hiiii Serem!!!"

⁴¹ NussaOfficial, "Nussa: Jadi Suka Sayur."

⁴² NussaOfficial, "Nussa: #BaikItuMudah."

<i>Jangan Sombong!</i>	Nussa and Umma	Character development & empathy	The narrative of the devil & refusing to prostrate, condemnation of sin, & the threat of “devil’s friends”
<i>Girlstalk</i>	Umma	Restrictions on self-expression & aesthetics	<i>Fiqh</i> concepts of <i>tabarruj</i> & the prohibition of pre-Islamic (<i>jahiliyah</i>) behavior (Q.S. Al-Ahzab)
<i>#BaikItuMudah</i>	Umma and Nussa	Control of consumerist behavior	The promise of multiplied Ramadan rewards & the recompense for good deeds
<i>Teman Spesial Rarra</i>	Umma	Social acceptance & inclusivity	Medical psychoeducation on autism concluding with the reframing “the key to paradise”

Based on Table 2, it is evident that parenting authority across all episodes consistently legitimizes its caregiving instructions through religious imperatives rather than through psychological reasoning related to child development. The domain of daily domestic life—ranging from nutritional discipline⁴³ and emotional regulation⁴⁴ to restrictions on personal grooming⁴⁵ and the management of fear⁴⁶—is consistently linked to religious principles, verses, or threats of sin in order to enforce the child’s obedience. Even in the episode “*Teman Spesial Rarra*,” where the parenting authority briefly incorporated a medical psychoeducational approach to autism, the issue was ultimately reframed within the theological framework of “the key to paradise” as the highest form of legitimization.⁴⁷ This pattern confirms that parenting within this discourse treats religion as a tool for enforcing discipline and upholding the unquestioned authority of parents.

This pattern of legitimization reveals a crucial point at which religion ceases to function as moral guidance and instead operates as a means of silencing. Developmental psychology affirms that values are truly internalized when children do not merely receive a message but accept it motivationally—a process that requires space for questioning and

⁴³ NussaOfficial, “Nussa: Jadi Suka Sayur.”

⁴⁴ NussaOfficial, “Nussa: Jangan Sombong.”

⁴⁵ NussaOfficial, “Nussa: Girls Talk.”

⁴⁶ NussaOfficial, “Nussa: Hiiii Serem!!!”

⁴⁷ NussaOfficial, “New Series ‘Rarra’: Teman Spesial Rarra.”

deliberation.⁴⁸ When caregivers close off that space by transforming every directive into an unquestionable theological imperative, what emerges is not deep-rooted faith but obedience dependent on external authority—a fragile submission grounded in the caregiver's power rather than in internalized conviction.⁴⁹ Herein lies the paradox: by turning religion into a symbol of domestic power, this dynamic risks diminishing religion itself, reducing it from a horizon of moral meaning to a mere instrument of control. Sanctifying such a parenting approach may reinforce short-term obedience but does so at the cost of obstructing the path to autonomous moral reasoning.⁵⁰ This reflection does not deny the spiritual value of raising children; rather, it questions whether a religion taught through suppression can develop into a lived belief or whether it survives only as long as the authority imposing it remains present.

This monopoly on parental authority is not established through the strength of argument but through religious claims that render every directive seemingly legitimate and indisputable. The parental figures—Umma, Nussa, and Grandfather—shut down the child's space for negotiation not by explaining the logical or emotional reasons behind their action, but by citing verses, *fiqh* terms, and calculations of rewards and sins that immediately halt the conversation. Within Bourdieu's framework, this constitutes symbolic power: its effectiveness derives not from the words themselves but from institutional authority borrowed from beyond language.⁵¹ Discourse that invokes sacred texts functions as an “authorized language” considered absolute. Due to the mechanism of misrecognition, the child accepts this legitimacy precisely because they do not perceive it as domination. Consequently, obedience to parents is disguised as spiritual obedience, so that any disagreement on the child's part is interpreted as a violation of doctrine.

This mechanism of symbolic power both expands and challenges existing scholarly discourse. On the one hand, these findings strengthen research on children's media by demonstrating how adult authority is unquestionably legitimized through transcendent

⁴⁸ Joan E. Grusec and Jacqueline J. Goodnow, “Impact of Parental Discipline Methods on the Child's Internalization of Values: A Reconceptualization of Current Points of View,” *Developmental Psychology* 30, no. 1 (January 1994): 4–19, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.30.1.4>.

⁴⁹ Jacqueline J. Goodnow, “Parenting and the Transmission and Internalization of Values: From Social-Cultural Perspectives to within-Family Analyses,” in *Parenting and Children's Internalization of Values: A Handbook of Contemporary Theory*, ed. Joan E. Grusec and Leon Kuczynski (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 233.

⁵⁰ Annette Mahoney et al., “Religion and the Sanctification of Family Relationships,” *Review of Religious Research* 44, no. 3 (March 2003): 220, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3512384>.

⁵¹ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 107.

claims.⁵² At the local level, they broaden studies of Islamic parenting in Indonesia—which have tended to be affirmative and prescriptive—by revealing how religious authority can bypass children’s reasoning.⁵³ Most importantly, these findings challenge the mainstream research on the “sanctification of parenting,” which generally associates sanctification with warm and inductive discipline.⁵⁴ This contrast reveals that the sanctification of authority does not automatically foster warmth; when exercised through a monopoly on interpretation and the suppression of negotiation, sanctification instead becomes an instrument of control. Thus, this study’s critical contribution underscores that what matters is not the mere presence of a sacred dimension in parenting, but rather how that dimension is articulated—as a space for dialogue that fosters growth or as a stamp of power that silences.

The Commodification of Religion and Pious Capitalism: The Transactional Nature of Piety in Children’s Consumer Culture

The establishment of parenting authority as the legitimate interpreter of doctrine ultimately intertwines with the logic of advanced capitalism and consumer culture, which influence in children’s religious media. In the landscape of religious mediatization, piety is no longer articulated solely as a personal spiritual experience but is commodified through the quantification of value, incentive mechanisms, and the promotion of a pious lifestyle.⁵⁵ The popular market transforms children’s spiritual teachings into exchangeable symbolic commodities—where concepts of reward, gifts, and even the ownership of material goods are packaged as manifestations of religious obedience. This fusion of media logic and market logic transforms piety into a form of “pious capitalism,” in which children’s

⁵² Lindsay Hahn, “Moral Clarity Decreases as Viewer Age Increases: A Content Analysis of the Moral Values and Reinforcement Cues Depicted in Popular U.S. Children’s Television,” *Journal of Children and Media* 16, no. 2 (April 3, 2022): 168–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2021.1943475>.

⁵³ Ahmad Yusuf Prasetiawan et al., “Mapping Islamic Parenting Research on Children and Families: A Bibliometric Review,” *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities* 6, no. 4 (December 5, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.58256/9bvdfp31>.

⁵⁴ Mahoney et al., “Religion and the Sanctification of Family Relationships”; Aaron Murray-Swank, Annette Mahoney, and Kenneth I. Pargament, “Sanctification of Parenting: Links to Corporal Punishment and Parental Warmth Among Biblically Conservative and Liberal Mothers,” *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 16, no. 4 (October 2006): 271–87, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327582ijpr1604_3.

⁵⁵ Greg Fealy, “Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia,” in *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*, ed. Greg Fealey and Sally White (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2008), 18, <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789812308528-011>.

character development is subtly integrated into transactional rationality and theologically legitimized expressions of consumerism.

The transactional nature of piety in children's media narratives quantifies religious values into mathematically calculated rewards, directly linking spiritual obedience to material gain. This economic exchange logic is explicitly articulated in the episode "*1 Huruf 10 Kebaikan*," where the practice of reciting the Qur'an is justified through the concept of numerical "reward savings": "...reading the Qur'an—even just one letter—earns a reward of ten good deeds... how much reward has been saved up."⁵⁶ This accumulation shifts into a material demand in the episode "*Jangan Sombong!*," when Rarra demands compensation for her religious achievements: "If a student excels, they should be given a reward, right..."⁵⁷ Similarly, in the episode "*#BaikItuIndah*," a child's worship is physically incentivized through Nussa's statement: "Here's a reward for fasting until *maghrib* (sunset)..."⁵⁸ Conversely, in the episode "*Teman Spesial Rarra*," this logic of instant transactions is interpreted differently; raising a child with autism is not rewarded with immediate material incentives but is reframed as a long-term eschatological endeavor: "...one of the many parents... whom Allah has chosen to be given the key to Paradise..."⁵⁹ This textual evidence confirms that children's media discourse frames pious acts as transactions of commercial value, where constant religious obedience demands both symbolic and material compensation.

The transactional nature of piety in narrative dialogue extends beyond the discourse structure and is visually crystallized at the program's conclusion as an instantly packaged moral message. This semiotic process encodes religious doctrine into "snackable content" or standardized moral slogans (see Figure 3).



Source: NussaOfficial YouTube Channel

⁵⁶ NussaOfficial, "Cerita Nussa & Rarra: 1 Huruf 10 Kebaikan."

⁵⁷ NussaOfficial, "Nussa: Jangan Sombong."

⁵⁸ NussaOfficial, "Nussa: #BaikItuMudah."

⁵⁹ NussaOfficial, "New Series 'Rarra': Teman Spesial Rarra."

Figure 3. Semiotic Operations on Religious Doctrine in the Closing Visuals

In the left panel, the epilogue text cites a theological narrative emphasizing the obligation to consume halal and wholesome sustenance, transforming the child's everyday domestic actions into a packaged spiritual message ready for the audience consumption.⁶⁰ In the center panel, the child's psychological anxiety and existential fears are succinctly condensed into a theology of protection ("Can Anything Disturb Us If We Have Drawn Near to God?"),⁶¹ simplifying emotional complexity into an immediate formula of faith. Meanwhile, in the right panel, the resolution of the character's crisis is crystallized into a moral aphorism ("there is no room for arrogance within himself").⁶² This epilogue card (end-card quote) demonstrates how religious media logic packages complex theological values into concise, standardized, and "snackable" visual communication commodities, allowing piety to function as a moral message that is easily digested and consumed by both children and parents.

The visualization of this moral epilogue and transactional statements culminates in a systematic linkage between religious rituals and market logic throughout the episode's narrative. Table 3 summarizes a systematic mapping of the commodification of religion and the mechanisms of pious value exchange across episodes.

Table 3. Mapping of Religious Commodification and Pious Capitalism Across Episodes

Episode	Forms of Religious Commodification	Value Exchange Mechanisms	Manifestations of Pious Capitalism
<i>Hiiii Serem!!!</i>	Promise of eschatological rewards for prayers and condolences	Praying for the deceased to receive rewards as great as Mount Uhud	Quantification of spiritual value into quantitative "reward"
<i>1 Huruf 10 Kebaikan</i>	Mathematics of Qur'anic recitation and charity	1 letter of the Qur'an leads to 10 good deeds / reward savings	Symbolic monetization of Qur'anic recitation as a "savings" asset for rewards

⁶⁰ NussaOfficial, "Nussa: Jadi Suka Sayur."

⁶¹ NussaOfficial, "Nussa: Hiiii Serem!!!"

⁶² NussaOfficial, "Nussa: Jangan Sombong."

<i>Jadi Suka Sayur</i>	Theological justification for healthy eating	Eating spinach to emulate Qur'anic Surah Al-An'am: 99 and wisdom	Linking domestic dietary habits to the fulfillment of religious doctrine
<i>Jangan Sombong!</i>	Demanding material gifts for religious achievements	High-achieving students / those who have memorized <i>surahs</i> claim gifts from parents	Direct material compensation for a child's piety
<i>Girlstalk</i>	Restricting beauty consumption via the doctrine of <i>tabarruj</i>	Limiting makeup tutorials toward avoiding the sins of the <i>Jahiliyyahera</i>	Integration of children's vlogging culture into the framework of Sharia aesthetics
<i>#BaikItuMudah</i>	Integration of Ramadan practices with e-commerce promotions	Doing good deeds / fasting to receive gift bags / headscarves & Bukalapak cashback	Pure pious capitalism (direct linking of worship with shopping vouchers)
<i>Teman Spesial Rarra</i>	Reframing the care of children with disabilities as eschatological capital	Patience in caring for an autistic child as the key to paradise	Converting the non-material burden of caregiving into an "investment" in paradise

Based on Table 3, the commodification of religion in this series operates not only on a symbolic level but also manifests in the tangible integration of religious values and market mechanisms. The blurring of the line between spirituality and commercialization is most explicitly illustrated in the episode “*#BaikItuMudah*,” where a child's acts of kindness and Ramadan fasting are directly linked to promotional vouchers and cashback from the e-commerce app Bukalapak at the end of the episode's conclusion.⁶³ Meanwhile, the mathematical quantification of rewards for reciting the Qur'an⁶⁴ and the use of physical gifts as compensation for memorizing *surahs*⁶⁵ confirm the transactional nature of piety. Even in the case of “*Teman Spesial Rarra*,” where material rewards in the form of goods are not presented directly, the transactional logic is not eliminated but rather transformed into a form of eschatological spiritual capital, embodied in the promise of the “key to

⁶³ NussaOfficial, “Nussa: *#BaikItuMudah*.”

⁶⁴ NussaOfficial, “Cerita Nussa & Rarra: 1 Huruf 10 Kebaikan.”

⁶⁵ NussaOfficial, “Nussa: *Jangan Sombong*.”

heaven” for parents.⁶⁶ This analysis demonstrates that consumer culture and pious capitalism have mediated the entire realm of children’s worship into a legitimized calculation of value exchange.

The calculations of value exchange depicted throughout these episodes invite reflection on what happens to a child’s motivation when kindness is taught as a transactional exchange. Developmental psychology has long documented the effect of overjustification: when actions that originally stemmed from internal motivation are consistently rewarded with external incentives, children tend to attribute their actions to those rewards, causing their original motivation to fade once the rewards are removed.⁶⁷ When reading the Qur’an is counted as “saving up rewards,” doing good is promised a gift, and fasting is rewarded with a prize, what is potentially instilled is not a love for goodness itself, but a cost-benefit calculation that makes obedience dependent on the presence of a reward. This reflection becomes even more acute when viewed from within the Islamic tradition itself: classical Islamic ethics emphasize that the value of a deed lies precisely in sincerity (*ikhlas*)—that is, the purification of intention from all motives that taint it.⁶⁸ When market logic infiltrates the teaching of worship, a religion that should emphasize the purity of intention ends up teaching that an act is valuable only to the extent that it brings a reward—a reversal that places the relationship between the child and God within the framework of a commercial exchange, where obedience is deposited and rewards are withdrawn.

This transactional logic reveals how the *Nussa and Rarra* series operationalizes piety according to market principles—transforming spiritual obedience into capital that can be quantified, exchanged, and accumulated. Daromir Rudnyckyj’s framework of “spiritual economies” elucidates this convergence: religion and capitalism merge when religious practices are reconfigured as sources of discipline for economic rationality.⁶⁹ Within this framework, rewards function as units of value, worship as a deposit, and recompense as the return on investment. The linkage of Ramadan practices with e-commerce vouchers in the “#BaikItuMudah” episode is the most explicit manifestation of this, while reframing the

⁶⁶ NussaOfficial, “New Series ‘Rarra’: Teman Spesial Rarra.”

⁶⁷ Mark R. Lepper, David Greene, and Richard E. Nisbett, “Undermining Children’s Intrinsic Interest with Extrinsic Reward: A Test of the ‘Overjustification’ Hypothesis,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 28, no. 1 (October 1973): 129–37, <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0035519>.

⁶⁸ Muḥammad bin Muḥammad Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm Ad-Dīn*, vol. 1 (Beirūt: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 265.

⁶⁹ Daromir Rudnyckyj, *Spiritual Economies: Islam, Globalization, and the Afterlife of Development* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 3.

patience required to care for an autistic child as the “key to heaven” demonstrates that when material rewards are absent, transactional logic shifts to eschatological capital. Thus, what emerges is the formation of an economic-religious subjectivity from an early age—where piety and calculation are taught as one and the same act.

When situated within a broader scholarly discourse, these findings on “pious capitalism” simultaneously reinforce, expand, and refine existing research. At the local level, they resonate with the literature on the commodification of Islam in Indonesia, which illustrates how the rise of middle-class Islam blends faith with consumer culture—from fashion and lifestyle to the instrumentalization of piety in electoral politics.⁷⁰ However, nearly all of this literature positions adults as sovereign consumers; this study’s contribution differs by revealing that similar transactional dynamics are applied to children—subjects who lack the critical capacity to negotiate them. On an interfaith level, these findings broaden the discourse—long dominated by the prosperity gospel within global evangelicalism—that links devotion to material rewards.⁷¹ The *Nussa and Rarra* series demonstrate that such transactional logic is not the exclusive to a single tradition. What distinguishes this study—and constitutes its novelty—is its focus on the target audience and medium: not adult congregants through televangelism, but preschoolers through cartoons that are, in fact, marketed as a means of instilling values. Thus, the commodification of piety has reached the earliest stage of religious subject formation.

Conclusion

The parenting practices that should be grounded in emotional validation, exploration of motives, and respect for children’s developmental stages are entirely absent in the *Nussa and Rarra* series. Instead, this study found that children’s natural psychological dynamics—ranging from existential curiosity and reluctance to eat to the expression of selfhood—are systematically detached from their developmental context and reframed as

⁷⁰ Karman, Ibnu Hamad, and Udi Rusadi, “Commodification of Instrumental Islamic Piety in Indonesian Political Contestation 2019,” *Asian Journal of Communication* 34, no. 3 (May 3, 2024): 265–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2023.2295871>; Hasan, “The Making of Public Islam: Piety, Agency, and Commodification on the Landscape of the Indonesian Public Sphere”; Hifsa Nurrahim and Muhammad Ruhul Jadid, “Commodifying the Unseen: Cyber-Capitalism, Rationalized Rituals, and the Reconfiguration of Religious Authority,” *Journal of Islam, Media and Society* 1, no. 1 (June 18, 2026): 22–42, <https://doi.org/10.66277/JIMS.1.1.240>.

⁷¹ Mara Einstein, *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age* (London: Routledge, 2008).

moral-religious crises that are promptly resolved. This discursive process operates on multiple levels: media logic bypasses children's psychological causality while simultaneously naturalizing it as normal through the workings of cultural reproduction; parenting authority is enforced through a monopoly on religious claims that disguise obedience to parents as spiritual obedience; and piety is commodified into a calculation of value exchange from an early age. All three converge on a single conclusion: what is cultivated is not a faith that is lived and reasoned through, but rather obedience and transactional reasoning cloaked in religious idioms.

These findings were derived through a multimodal discourse analysis that combines textual reading, visual semiotic analysis, and the mapping of cross-episode patterns. This approach proved effective because it treats psychological reduction, the legitimization of authority, and the commodification of religion as a unified set of mutually reinforcing discursive operations. However, this study focuses exclusively on textual analysis and has not yet addressed the dimension of reception—how children and parents, as real audiences, interpret, negotiate, or reject these messages. Further research could therefore undertake reception studies or audience ethnography to examine the extent to which these discursive operations are internalized in everyday parenting practices. Additionally, the limitation of focusing on a single series opens the door for comparative studies across religious children's media—both across traditions and across countries—to determine whether this pattern is unique to the *Nussa and Rarra* series or reflects a broader phenomenon of religious mediatization in global popular culture.

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Data Availability Statement:

The authors ensure that the datasets necessary to replicate the conclusions of this work are presented in their entirety within the article [and/or] its supplementary information.

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The author(s) declare no conflict of interest and confirm that all data were analyzed objectively and ethically, with proper citation of sources.

Ethical Approval:

This study analyzes publicly available audiovisual materials from the *Nussa and Rarra* series on YouTube and does not involve human participants or primary data collection. Therefore, formal ethical clearance is not required. The research adheres to standard academic ethical guidelines for media discourse analysis.

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